

something like happiness by theproblematicgay

Series: [all your love and your longing](#) [2]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: "secret", Background Relationships, Billy Hargrove Is Bad at Feelings, Billy Hargrove Needs Love, Billy Hargrove Redemption, Billy Hargrove Tries to Be a Better Person, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Canonical Child Abuse, Gay Billy Hargrove, Gen, M/M, Period Typical Attitudes, Period-Typical Homophobia, Secret Relationship, Sexuality Crisis, yes they're very subtle

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lonnie Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Joyce Byers & Billy Hargrove

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2021-07-23

Updated: 2021-07-23

Packaged: 2022-03-31 10:29:43

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,653

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

It's a realisation for Max, she thinks on the short walk back to the car, holding everything she needs in either hand.

She isn't so sure what it is for Billy. Whether it's an end to something inside of him he doesn't need anymore; something he's been waiting for; a starting point; or something more complicated and incoherent neither of them could really understand yet - all that matters at that moment is that they're going to be okay.

Billy only lets her hand go when he needs it to change gears. Even then, she leaves it outstretched between them, and knows they're going to need each other, and that's all right, 'cause she also knows

they're all right. More than that. Something like happiness.

something like happiness

Author's Note:

*run fast for your mother
run fast for your father
run for your children
for your sisters and brothers*

*leave all your love and your longing
behind
you can't carry it with you if you want
to survive*

*-Dog Days Are Over, Florence + the
Machine*

Billy's passed out on the brown sofa, the leather crackling under his shifting weight as he turns in his sleep. Max knows Joyce had gotten it secondhand; she'd helped Steve carry it inside last week, but she hadn't expected it to be as battered as it was.

Joyce hadn't seemed to mind much however, not after Billy had insisted it was comfortable enough and offered one of his rare, *I'm-trying* smiles. She had patted his hair and stifled her own smile, one that showcased just how unbearably protective she'd become of Billy in the past few weeks.

Max had already loved Joyce. She is kind and sweet, though Max has never once seen her put up with anyone's bullshit. She's strong and generous and caring. She is everything she has started to wish her own mom was. Lately, she's wanted to hug her at every opportunity. Lately, she's started to believe Billy's beginning to love Joyce too.

The last time Neil had hit Billy had been the last time he went home. He'd only gone back to pick up some of his things but had still turned up at Steve's with a red cheek and bruised lip. Since then, he's started staying at Steve's.

Max doesn't know how exactly they even became friends, let alone whatever... *this* was. They were secretive as shit about their incredibly guarded thing, which they insisted was not a *thing*. Max hardly saw them less than a foot apart anymore. It seemed that they'd caught on to her snooping.

She wasn't too discouraged at that. She had her ways, after all.

She sometimes feels bad, thinking about her mom when she doesn't come home from Will's or Mike's or Steve's or El's for *days*. But then she thinks of Billy, how he'd felt for years, trapped, cornered under the same roof as his own demogorgon, and she shoves it right back down to where it came from, thinks, *what did she expect to happen?* Thinks, *fuck her*.

She's choosing Billy, and she'll be damned if she ever goes back on that because she doesn't think anyone has ever chosen Billy in his life.

Max would like - *really*, like - to see Neil try and pull his shit again. *He won't*.

She knows Hopper, always looking as exasperated and done with all their shit every time he pulls up in his truck to drop El off. How he'd rip anyone apart who stood in the way of their safety. Joyce had promised not to tell him anything, but Max knows he's always there if they need him. If Billy needs him.

Hell, she knows they have El on their side, which is more than enough really.

Max feels angry, vicious, not unlike a hurricane.

She feels a little like how she imagines Billy must still get sometimes, like his old self.

Since he'd left home, Billy has stayed at Joyce's enough to know how awful her casserole is, and shares Will's look of dread when she presents it most Thursdays. He knows that nobody ever speaks about Mr. Byers; at least, not in Joyce's presence. He's helped Will with his homework a few times after Joyce had struggled to understand calculus a few weeks ago. He's cooked whenever he's been allowed, which Mrs. Byers had recognised as his particular flavour of gratitude, an unspoken yet heard *thank you*.

He isn't an unexpected guest anymore; Joyce pushes a plate into his hands and kisses his cheek every time he comes back, as she does for Will and Jonathan.

As much as he tries to resist her affection every time, Max could see that he loves it, loves her and often needs her just as much as everyone else does. Maybe more.

"Are you staying tonight?" Will asks, bumping his elbow into her side. She sees Joyce perk up, eavesdropping, even though her back is to them where she's standing at the counter.

She glances toward Billy.

"Billy?" He ignores her; she knows he is half-conscious at the least by now. He grumbles when she makes her way over to poke him in the arm.

"What?" He groans, crossing his arms and turning away from her into the cushion of the sofa.

"You staying?"

He sighs. "Yeah. Steve's parents are back for a few days so I got out of the way," he shrugs.

Joyce huffs as she sits heavily into the armchair across the room. "Well, you stay however long you need, Billy."

Billy turns slightly so she can see his face when he says, "thanks, Mrs. Byers."

"Joyce, sweetheart."

Max has already turned toward Will. "You still got that sleeping bag? I'll stay in your room. I'll go home tomorrow instead."

No one comments about how she's been avoiding going home as often as she can lately. Joyce and Will only smile and, with Billy's back to her, she can't read his expression.

She's gotten good at reading his however. She imagines it would probably be nonchalant, and, though he'd deny 'til the day he died,

something soft and sympathetic in his eyes.

The night they had turned up unannounced at the Byers', Max's cheek stinging and Billy shaking with adrenaline, Billy had called Steve, not for the first time. It hadn't even taken him ten minutes to come over.

He'd seen Max first, sat at the window and fiddling with one of Will's crayons, her cheek turned away, hidden. He'd asked her if she was okay, but only after he knew Billy was too. She'd liked that Billy had been put first for once.

That night, Billy had slept in his car, much to Mrs. Byers' disapproval. She hadn't pushed him though, had just handed him a literal mountain of blankets.

She'd stumbled out the front door sometime around midnight, half-asleep but unable to lie on Will's floor any longer after the dream she'd had, and spotted Billy's curls through one of the back windows. She hadn't wanted to disturb him, just climb in the front passenger seat and try to close her eyes without seeing the Mind Flayer, the demogorgons, her goddamn stepfather.

Billy's car, reeking of cigarettes and his stupid cologne, was familiar and ten times more comforting than the pillows and blankets Will had given her.

Before she could even step off the porch though, she'd realised he was awake. She could tell by the way his curls had moved against the backseat window.

It had taken her far too long to realise that Steve's car was still parked a few feet away, empty.

Billy hadn't been alone that night, and as much as she had wanted to know, she'd turned on her heel and left before they could spot her, before she could be tempted to spy. She'd sat at the kitchen table

until Joyce had wandered in at five in the morning, rubbing her eyes. She'd been worried Max hadn't slept at all, which was partly true, but she'd convinced Joyce she'd only been there an hour.

"You're gonna be alright, sweetheart."

Max had hugged her, confident when she'd said, "I know," into her shoulder, muffled somewhat by her cardigan.

Billy had lumbered inside a few hours later after Joyce had left for work and Jonathan and Will were at school. Joyce had spoken to the principal for them, told them to stay as long as they wanted and to call the store if they needed her. Max couldn't imagine what they would've done without her.

It hadn't gone unnoticed by anyone that Steve had slept in Billy's car, blissfully unaware, his BMW still parked in the drive. Neither Joyce nor Jonathan had commented, but Will had shared a knowing look with Max.

She'd never have thought Billy of all people would have been gay. But, in a lot of ways, she guesses it makes a lot of sense.

Max doesn't know why she hadn't just let Mrs. Byers convince her to stay home for a few more days. Home, or Will's bedroom floor, or El's.

She'd gone home, which she hadn't decided was a good decision or not yet. She hadn't turned to look at her mother sitting on the sofa, or Neil at the kitchen table and had headed straight to the bathroom. After rummaging through her school bag, she set down a hair dye box on the toilet seat lid.

Half an hour later, she was trying to scrub the dye stains from her

forehead when her mother knocked on the door.

It sounded like she hesitated for a moment before she spoke. "Are you alright, honey?"

"Yeah."

She doesn't feel like talking today. And despite how she knows her mom can tell, she still says, "I called the principal today. I wanted to know how you were doing." There's a pause. "He said Joyce Byers called for you?"

Max grabs the towel and throws the door open, even though she tries her hardest for it to be casual. She starts towel-drying her hair as she waits for a reaction, a mass of blonde spilling out.

"What did you do?" Susan whispers. She reaches out, the gesture automatic and takes a gentle handful of it, as though her hair were a fragile and ruined thing. Max doesn't know herself yet if she does or is going to regret the colour choice. She shakes her hair out of her mother's hand a little too hastily to be nonchalant.

"I didn't like it," she says, calmly, though she can feel that the look in her eyes is anything but calm. She sweeps her gaze to meet her mother's wide eyes when she says, "so I changed it." It feels deliberate and final, as though she has just drawn a line in the sand and she is on the other side of it.

She heads to her bedroom in long, determined strides, and lets the door close behind her.

She wears her hair down to school the next day, and every girl in her class either compliments her or grins her way.

"I wish my mom would let me do mine," Kelly Parkinson, the girl who sits next to her in English grumbles under her breath, playing with her own hair with a scowl.

Max just smiles at her. "Go and get one after school and just do it. That's what I did," she shrugs.

Kelly laughs and mutters, “You’re wild, you know that, California?”

Max can only laugh and shrug. She *feels* wild in that moment; wild and tempestuous and feverish with delight. She feels *happy*.

Billy just lets a small smile rest at the corner of his mouth and ruffles a hand through her hair when she climbs into his car a few hours later. “I like it; very West Coast.”

She cackles, loud and a little hysterical. His smile only grows when she says, “my mom didn’t.”

He turns to look at her with a grin, all teeth as he pulls out of the parking lot. “Fuck her.”

She smiles, leans her arm against the open window and sighs contentedly. They stop for strawberry milkshakes on the way to the Byers’.

“Oh, would you *fuck off*, Joyce!”

Billy and Max both tense, sit upright as they pull up in the drive. There’s an unfamiliar 442 parked beside Joyce’s Pinto. Joyce herself is on the porch, Jonathan and Will flanking her, fists tight at their sides. There is a man standing offensively before them, shoulders broadened and wide in his stance. Max immediately labels him as a threat, judging by the look on Will’s face.

“You’re drunk,” Joyce snaps. “Get off my property before I call the Chief, Lonnie.”

Joyce spots them sitting in the car a few feet away where the man hasn’t bothered to acknowledge them. Her eyes widen in some sort of

plea Max can't decipher. She decides to stay in the car and not get involved, and hopefully, that's what Joyce is asking of them.

Billy, however, doesn't seem to get the memo.

He lays that now-foreign, old facade on thick, practically dripping with false charm. The viciousness of a chained dog in his expression, an unrestrained, siren-loud warning in his eyes.

"Hey, kid," Billy calls to Will who instantly looks up to meet his eyes as he saunters over with a slow smile, all teeth. "Is this guy bothering you?" he asks with an easy grin, coaxing something other than dread into Will's eyes.

It's funny, a few months ago, this Billy, this bloodthirsty affectation he seems to have conjured right back into existence with ease, would've scared the shit out of both Will and Max.

Lonnie's teeth click as he falls quiet, watching Billy irritatedly as he strides right past him.

Billy's wearing a sleeveless tank that shows how his hackles rise, the way Max has seen them do many times before. The muscles in his arms ripple as he turns to look Lonnie up and down, sizing him up. It clearly has the desired effect as the man puffs his chest, not wanting to be upstaged by some cocky teenager.

"Who the fuck is this?" He spits at Joyce, unsettled and less than pleased to be interrupted.

Joyce pays him no mind and sets a hand on Billy's shoulder as he approaches the trio that have packed themselves tightly together on the porch.

Max debates locking the Camaro's doors, shoots a calculating look toward Lonnie.

She had noticed the way that Billy had joined the group at once, a sense of belonging falling over him, even if it was only Max that had detected it. She wants to smile; she's overjoyed for Billy, but this isn't the time and place for delight.

Joyce doesn't answer Lonnie, instead acknowledging Billy's unspoken question. "This is Lonnie, my ex."

Billy doesn't falter, doesn't let anything but a scowl wash over his face. He turns somewhat to glance at Will and Jonathan. There's an uneven mix of fear and fury seeping into their body language, something Billy knows how to read fluently.

Will is small and all hair, a mop of blonde that hides big blue eyes when it grows enough. Billy sees himself, vibrating with something he hadn't understood and hadn't known how to contain back then.

He steps off the porch and motions with a jerk of his head for Max to join them instead. She gets out and stalks over, stands in front of them, arms crossed over her chest. She'd like to see anyone try and get past her and her brother.

A hand slips into hers and she squeezes it. Will lets himself deflate a little at that, and Max can tell he feels safe now, like she and Billy will take care of everything.

"Just who the fuck do you think-" Lonnie starts, but Billy swings a fist into his face before he can come any closer, knocking him off balance and back a few steps, cupping his jaw.

The uppercut has clearly sobered Lonnie up somewhat, but it's Jonathan joining Billy at his side that seems to drain the arrogance and condescension from him.

"Get lost before I make you."

Lonnie chuckles thunderously, something dangerous, but it's nothing compared to promise in Billy's eyes, the hostile air radiating from Jonathan, and they all seem to realise that.

He turns back to his car with a scowl, spitting at the lot of them the entire way.

He eventually rips away from the house and into the street, disappearing as he speeds from sight.

Joyce doesn't thank Billy, doesn't set a hand on his shoulder or in his hair. She draws him into her arms and holds him for a solid minute. Max can see the way the tension gradually melts from his shoulders, and, in his typical fashion, hesitantly sets a careful hand against her

back, accepting it.

The strawberry milkshakes sit in the car, melting, warming in the sun.